

VZCZCXRO3106
PP RUEHFL RUEHNP
DE RUEHRO #0904 1221128
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 021128Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7884
INFO RUEHFL/AMCONSUL FLORENCE PRIORITY 2350
RUEHMIL/AMCONSUL MILAN PRIORITY 8600
RUEHNP/AMCONSUL NAPLES PRIORITY 2508
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY 4516
RUEHRC/USDA FAS WASHDC PRIORITY 4474

UNCLAS ROME 000904

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE FOR FAS - ELIZABETH JONES
DEPARTMENT PASS TO USTR D. VETTER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ETRD](#) [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [EU](#) [IT](#)

SUBJECT: ITALY ABSTAINS IN EU VOTE ON BIOTECH SUGAR BEETS

REF: STATE 50150

Sensitive But Unclassified. Not for Internet distribution.

1. (U) On April 19, Minister Counselor for Agricultural Affairs delivered reftel points on EU approval for import of biotech sugar beets and stacked biotech corn varieties to the Italian Ministries of Agriculture and Health. Officials in the Italian Ministries of Health and Agriculture told us these ministries agreed to vote "yes" at the EU Standing Committee. Embassy Rome subsequently learned that the Italian representative at the EU's Standing Committee on Food and Feed Safety abstained from voting, still a significant departure for Italy, which has been a reliable "no" vote on biotech issues in the past.

2. (SBU) The GOI's change in position is likely due to the influence of Agriculture Minister Paolo De Castro, who has privately assured us that he supports biotech products. During the recent problem with the inclusion of LL601 rice in U.S. commercial shipments to Italy, De Castro refrained from commenting publicly on the case. De Castro, who is rumored to aspire to be an EU Commissioner, may also be trying to align Italy with European proponents of biotechnology and to send the message that Italy is concentrating on science over politics.

3. (SBU) A second driving force behind the change in GOI policy is Under Secretary of Health Gianpaolo Patta. During the LL601 controversy, Patta took a pragmatic approach to the discovery of LL601 rice in shipments to Italy, listened to his technicians and specialists, and avoided inflammatory statements. Embassy will seek out opportunities to engage Patta on biotech issues in an effort to gauge his position on biotech products.

Spogli